

The week ending April 26, 2013

IRAN

U.N. nuclear watchdog says Iran meeting set for mid-May

The U.N. nuclear watchdog [said](#) it will hold a new meeting with Iran on May 15 aimed at enabling its inspectors to resume a stalled investigation into suspected nuclear bomb research by the Islamic state. The International Atomic Energy Agency has been trying for more than a year to coax Iran into granting IAEA officials the access to sites, documents and officials they want for their inquiry. Tehran says its nuclear program is entirely peaceful. The May meeting will be the 10th round of talks since early 2012 in the search for a framework accord between the two sides that would set the terms for how the IAEA should conduct its inquiry, so far without success. The meeting will take place about a week before the IAEA is expected to issue its next report on Iran's nuclear program, and ahead of a June 3-7 meeting of the IAEA's 35-nation governing board, when the Iranian nuclear issue will again be on the agenda. Western powers suspect Iran is trying to develop the capability to produce nuclear weapons under the guise of a declared civilian atomic energy program. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).

U.S.-Israel Relationship

Hagel emphasizes need for close U.S.-Israel ties

U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said Tuesday that the U.S. and Israel need to ensure that their alliance remains close, as Mideast security challenges grow more complicated, the [Associated Press](#) reported. "This is a difficult and dangerous time," Hagel said before starting a closed-door meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "This is a time when friends and allies must remain close, closer than ever." In his remarks, Netanyahu thanked the Obama administration for deepening ties over the past four years. He said the U.S. and Israel's shared interests and values are especially challenged by "the arming of terrorist groups by Iran with sophisticated weapons, and equally, Iran's attempt to arm itself with nuclear weapons. On Monday, Hagel was asked whether he believes it would be advisable for Israel to attack Iran on its own. "That calculation has to be made by" Israel, he replied after noting, "Israel is a sovereign nation; every sovereign nation has a right to defend itself."

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

Israel and Palestinians Agree on U.N. Work in Jerusalem

Israel and the Palestinians agreed on Tuesday to renewed involvement by Unesco, the United Nations cultural agency, in the Old City of Jerusalem. The agreement was a small but significant breakthrough in the often highly politicized workings of the agency.

According to [The New York Times](#), the deal concerns the Old City and its walls, including the Western Wall and an ascent to the Temple Mount, or Haram al-Sharif. It was brokered in an unusual partnership between the United States and Russia, with the help of Jordan, Brazil and the director general of Unesco, Irina Bokova. As part of the arrangement, the Palestinians agreed to postpone five resolutions critical of Israel that were pending before the agency.

GREATER MIDDLE EAST

U.S. Moves Against Hezbollah 'Cartel'

[The Wall Street Journal](#) reported that the Obama administration charged Hezbollah with operating like an international drug cartel and blacklisted two Lebanese money-exchange houses for allegedly moving tens of millions of dollars of drug profit through the U.S. financial system on behalf of the militant group. The Treasury Department's action Tuesday marked the latest salvo in a two-year U.S. government campaign against Hezbollah's alleged drug-trafficking activities. U.S. officials alleged that Hezbollah is using proceeds from this narcotics trade to fund international terrorist activities and to bolster the forces of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in their fight against a widening political rebellion. U.S. officials also said Hezbollah is increasingly reverting to illicit trade to offset diminished funding coming from Iran, the organization's closest ally. "Hezbollah is operating like a major drug cartel," said Derek Maltz, a special agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration, who is overseeing the U.S. probe into Hezbollah. "These proceeds are funding violence against Americans."

Egypt proceeds with judiciary law despite uproar

Egypt's Islamist-led parliament pushed ahead with a law that could force into retirement many of the nation's most senior judges, despite an uproar by the judiciary over fears the president's allies want to control the courts. The country's Judges' Club, an organization representing Egypt's judges, [vowed](#) to turn to international organizations, such as the United Nations and African Union, to investigate what they said are violations against the judiciary. The crisis over the judiciary is a reflection of the deep polarization that has split the country. The judiciary, with mostly secular-minded professional judges, is seen by many Egyptians as the one of the only remaining buffers against Islamists' monopoly on power following the ouster of authoritarian ruler Hosni Mubarak in 2011. Since then, Islamist parties have swept elections and dominated legislative councils.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israel's Top Cop Offers U.S. Terrorism Advice

A long-scheduled U.S. trip by the commissioner of the Israel Police has turned into an impromptu series of consultations on preventing terrorism in the wake of the Boston bombings. Commissioner Yochanan Danino arrived in the U.S. two days after the terrorist attack on the Boston Marathon to meet with officials at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security and New York Police Department, where he [delivered a sobering message](#): "It's very hard to deal with this kind of terrorism." Danino said the attacks allegedly carried out by two native Chechens who lived in the U.S. for a decade appear not to be connected to a foreign terrorist organization, which meant foreign-intelligence clues would be of little help. This information is an update to the information contained in this week's [Sermon Tidbits](#). To subscribe to Sermon Tidbits, click [here](#).